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National Intelligence Bulletin

April 30, 1976
C O N T E N T S

USSR: Ustinov appointed as
new minister of defense 1

[Redacted]

25X1

LEBANON: Jumblatt requests
presidential election be postponed 4

USSR-CHINA: Soviet embassy in
Peking damaged by bomb 5

USSR-CHINA: *Pravda* details Soviet
efforts to improve relations 6

ITALY: Collapse of Moro's
government imminent 7

INDIA: Supreme Court upholds
Gandhi's denial of habeas corpus 9

ISRAEL: Renewed Arab
demonstrations expected 11

[Redacted]

25X1

National Intelligence Bulletin

April 30, 1976

USSR

The appointment of Soviet party secretary Dmitry Ustinov as minister of defense has allowed the Soviet leadership to finesse the question whether a military successor to Marshal Grechko should inherit his Politburo seat.

Ustinov, a civilian, was promoted to full membership on the Politburo at the recently concluded 25th party congress. His selection also means a slight narrowing of the political decision-making circle. Grechko's seat on the Politburo has been vacated, and it remains to be seen whether Ustinov's impending departure from the party secretariat will produce the addition of any new faces to that body or the elevation of any of the "junior" secretaries to the Politburo as candidate or full members.

Ustinov, who is 67, may have been chosen to serve while General Kulikov, the chief of the General Staff, acquires more seniority. Kulikov, 55, might well move up to succeed Ustinov at a later date. Unlike the other professional soldiers at the top of the military hierarchy—for example, Marshal Yakubovsky or generals Tolubko, Sokolov, and Pavlovsky, who are already in their 60s—Kulikov has not been eliminated from the running for the top military post in the future.

For the moment, however, Ustinov's appointment means that the military has been left without one of its own on the Politburo. Although Ustinov has an extensive background in defense production and has been promoted to the rank of general of the army, he is not a professional soldier and has no command experience.

Ustinov's appointment will cause problems for the country's command and control over the armed forces. It seems likely that a good deal of the command authority that defense ministers have had over the armed forces will pass to the General Staff. Brezhnev, who was recently publicly identified as the chairman of the Defense Council, may acquire some formal command authority over the armed forces in peacetime. To date, he has been the leader designated to act as supreme commander in chief in the event of war, but apparently has not had any authority to issue orders to the armed forces in peacetime.

The speed with which Ustinov's appointment was announced—only hours after Grechko's ashes had been interred in the Kremlin wall—suggests that the top leadership was anxious to head off any politicking over the selection of Grechko's successor. It may provoke an adverse reaction among some members of the high command opposed to the idea that a non-professional should hold the top post in the ministry.

National Intelligence Bulletin

April 30, 1976

As a civilian, Ustinov will probably have a somewhat different outlook on defense matters than would a professional soldier. His background in the armaments field and in industry may formulate an integration of strategic planning with resource allocation, research and development, armaments programming, and national mobilization than would be likely under a military defense minister.

As one unencumbered by service loyalties, Ustinov may be expected to weigh more impartially the claims on resources and the advice on defense matters offered by the various members of the high command. His background suggests, however, that if he leans in any direction, it will be toward modern strategic weapons systems.

We have no firm evidence as to his views, but we doubt that his appointment will lead to any change in the Soviet position at the Strategic Arms Limitation Talks, with which he has been involved, or at the force reduction talks.

25X1

25X1

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National Intelligence Bulletin

April 30, 1976

LEBANON

Lebanon's leftist leader Kamal Jumblatt issued a formal request yesterday that the presidential election scheduled for tomorrow be postponed. Jumblatt has been threatening to boycott the electoral session, claiming there has been too little time to consider the presidential candidates. He is now charging that Syria is trying to manipulate the elections to the disadvantage of his leftist coalition.

Beirut radio followed up the announcement of the new request with warnings—probably at Jumblatt's instigation—that only a compromise on a candidate other than Ilyas Sarkis or Raymond Edde, the controversial front-runners, could prevent a “new explosion.”

Jumblatt's demands are an eleventh-hour effort to block Sarkis, whose Syrian-backed candidacy has gained a significant edge in the last several days over Jumblatt's choice, Raymond Edde. Sarkis is believed to have close to the 66 votes necessary to give him a first-ballot win.



25X1

Speaker of parliament Kamal Asad, who is responsible for fixing the election date, is polling other deputies on Jumblatt's postponement request. He has indicated that his bloc of deputies is prepared to find a compromise candidate, if that will satisfy Jumblatt. Asad will probably not make a final decision before checking with Damascus.

Jumblatt could trigger enough violence in Beirut to make it impossible to convene parliament. Many deputies have already expressed concern over the level of fighting in the capital.

If Jumblatt succeeds in delaying the session for any length of time, either through legal means or through violence, he may again be on a collision course with the Syrians. His moves will almost certainly elicit a sharp reaction from the Christians, who may counter with threats to withhold President Franjiah's resignation and to press for partition.

National Intelligence Bulletin

April 30, 1976

In a move to bolster Syria's military presence in Beirut just before the election, additional troops reportedly moved to the capital area yesterday. According to press dispatches that we are not yet able to confirm, some 40 to 60 Syrian trucks carrying what may amount to a battalion of about 400 troops, as well as ammunition and supplies, arrived in the Beirut area from eastern Lebanon. One of the dispatches reported that the troops were special forces of the Palestine Liberation Army—an often-used cover for regular Syrian forces.

About 2,000 Syrian regulars have been positioned just inside Lebanon at Al Masna for about three weeks, with other major Syrian forces deployed just across the border inside Syria. Syrian forces also have been positioned for several weeks in the port cities of Tripoli, Sidon, and possibly Tyre, as well as in the Beirut area.

25X1

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USSR-CHINA

The Soviets have officially protested an explosion Thursday at their embassy in Peking. It apparently caused limited damage to the embassy but may have killed two Chinese guards. No Soviet personnel were injured. The Chinese have commented only that the matter is "under investigation," but they may eventually feel it necessary to respond publicly to the protest.

Given the current emphasis on "business as usual" in Peking following the demonstrations of April 5, it is highly unlikely that any faction would care to take credit for an act of this sort, but it may have been factionally inspired. It would be almost impossible for a non-Chinese to have set off the explosion.

Some Chinese may have hoped to discredit the authorities responsible for maintaining order in the capital. These authorities dispersed the demonstrators in Tien An-men Square on the night of April 5, and they were honored on April 26 for their work by a large Politburo contingent, in which leftist leaders were prominent. A more remote possibility is that an individual or group, anxious to discredit the unrelenting and abrasive aspects of current Chinese policy toward Moscow by deliberately carrying anti-Sovietism to unacceptable lengths, was responsible for the incident.

25X1

25X1

National Intelligence BulletinApril 30, 1976

USSR-CHINA

The Soviet leadership has published a lengthy article on China attempting to convince other communists that Moscow has done all it can to improve relations with Peking. The article appeared in *Pravda* on Wednesday, signed with the authoritative pseudonym I. Aleksandrov. It was tough on the Chinese and held out very little hope for a change in Sino-Soviet relations unless and until Peking makes concessions to Moscow.

The recital of what the Soviets have done to encourage better party and state relations with China is the longest authoritative commentary in years. Aleksandrov went back to 1964 and touched on the proposals the Soviets have made for a summit, increased cultural and economic exchanges, and agreements on non-use of force. Citing General Secretary Brezhnev's comments on China at the recent Soviet party congress, Aleksandrov implied that Moscow had made its last offer. Any additional progress in Sino-Soviet relations clearly would be up to the Chinese.

Aleksandrov referred to the recent political turbulence in Peking as evidence that the Chinese people are not reconciled to Maoism, but his only attempt to exploit it seemed to be in the way he focused on "Mao and his group" as the "main inspirers and organizers of China's anti-Sovietism." The message for China's moderates would seem to be that the USSR recognizes that not all Chinese are anti-Soviet and believes things may improve after Mao goes.

Aleksandrov indicated Moscow's willingness to resume talks on a border settlement and eventually make some territorial adjustments, but he berated China for making "monstrous" territorial claims and indicated Moscow's continued unwillingness to recognize or withdraw from territory China regards as disputed.

25X1

25X1

National Intelligence Bulletin

April 30, 1976

ITALY

A month of political turmoil in Italy over the role of the Communist Party seems likely to culminate, possibly today, in the collapse of Prime Minister Moro's government. There is only the slimmest chance the dissolution of parliament and an early election can be avoided.

Parliament will conclude today a debate on Moro's Christian Democratic minority government. Moro cannot win the confidence vote, scheduled to follow the debate, because the three parties on which his survival depends—the Socialists, Social Democrats, and Republicans—have decided to vote against him or to abstain. Moro may resign in advance of the balloting.

Doubtless looking toward an election, Moro has tried to use the debate to blame the left for the deteriorating political situation. The Socialists and Communists have countered with charges that the Christian Democrats are responsible because of their refusal to endorse an emergency formula, which would have given the Communists a formal policymaking role short of actual cabinet membership.

The Christian Democrats are divided internally and generally ill-prepared to face the electorate.

25X1

The Lockheed affair is at the moment the most burdensome problem plaguing the Christian Democrats. Since the allegations last week that a former Christian Democratic prime minister had accepted a bribe several years ago, the Lockheed case has become a major scandal overshadowing all other issues in the media. Despite denials by the three Christian Democrats mentioned, the case is generally portrayed as the most damaging evidence of Christian Democratic corruption unearthed so far. In addition, the press is rife with conspiracy theories, including the claim that the revelations are a conscious plot by the US either to force out old guard Christian Democrats or to create enough chaos to permit an extra-legal right-wing solution of the political impasse.

The media, moreover, has tended to assume that President Leone is the guilty party. This has triggered rumors that Leone might resign whether guilty or not.

25X1

National Intelligence Bulletin

April 30, 1976

A resignation by Leone, who is empowered by the constitution to dissolve parliament, would obviously complicate, and possibly forestall, an early election.

Communist chief Berlinguer remains unenthusiastic about an early election and wary of the political polarization that the campaign would likely produce. Party rank and file, however, are urging the leadership to push for an election and to move toward an alliance with the Socialists. The Communist leadership continues to emphasize its preference for an eventual partnership with the Christian Democrats—Berlinguer's "historic compromise"—but is reportedly appalled at the speed with which the Christian Democratic Party seems to be disintegrating.

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25X1

National Intelligence Bulletin

April 30, 1976

INDIA

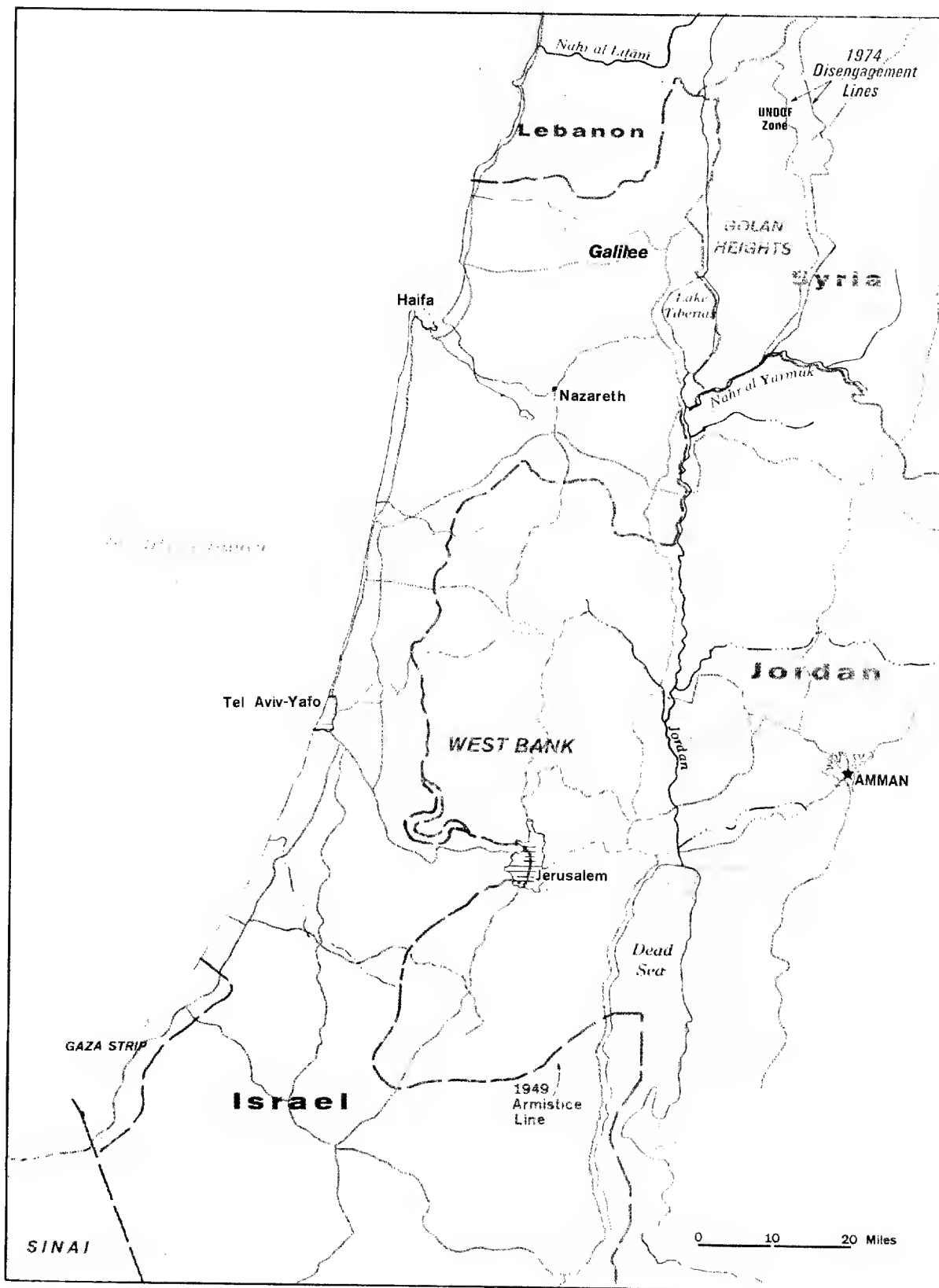
The Indian Supreme Court's 4-to-1 ruling on Wednesday, denying the courts the right to hear habeas corpus petitions from prisoners for the duration of the national emergency, is a victory for Prime Minister Gandhi.

The Supreme Court took up the issue last December, at the government's request, after a number of state courts ruled that the right of habeas corpus could not be suspended during the emergency that was declared last June. The government had claimed that it could legally suspend all fundamental rights while the emergency, which Gandhi could extend indefinitely, is in effect.

The decision blocks judicial redress for tens of thousands arrested since last June. Emergency laws enable the government in effect to detain prisoners indefinitely. Many detainees have been released, but opposition party leaders and several dozen members of parliament are among those still in jail.

Although the Supreme Court sided with Gandhi on this important issue, she almost certainly remains determined to curb the power of the judiciary to impose restraints on her authority. Proposed constitutional changes that would strengthen the executive branch of the government and weaken the judiciary are now being considered by officials of Gandhi's Congress Party. Such changes may be submitted this summer to parliament, which is dominated by the Congress Party, and to the state legislatures for ratification.

25X1



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National Intelligence Bulletin

April 30, 1976

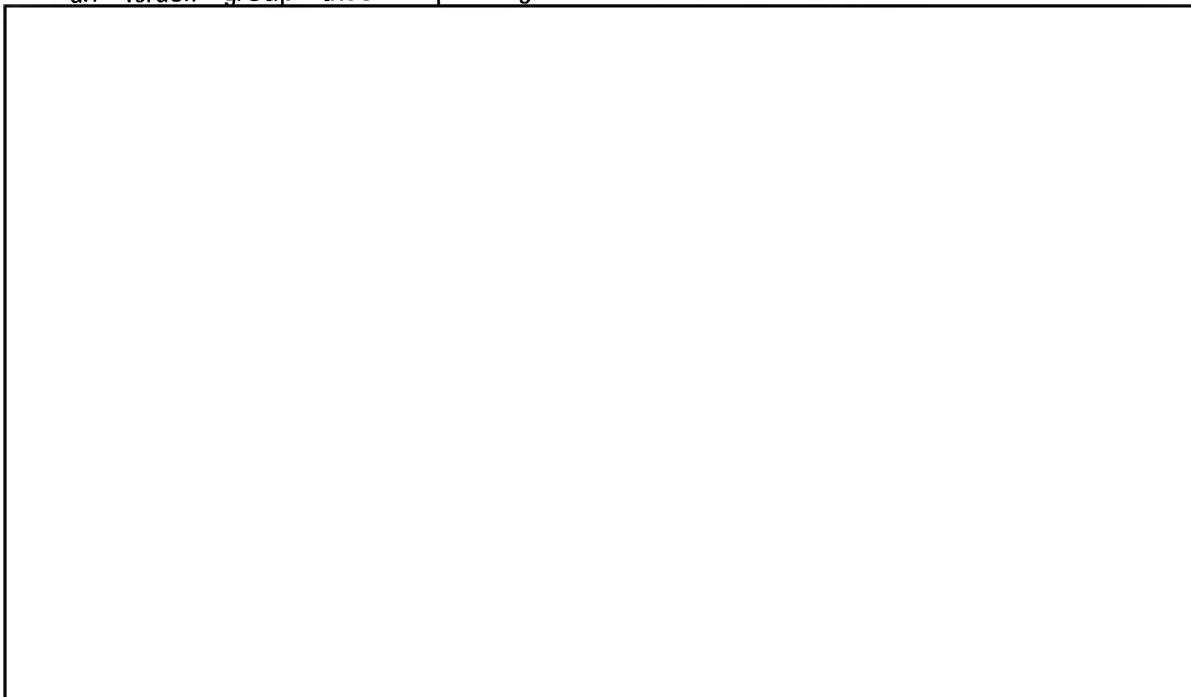
ISRAEL

The Israeli government is concerned that May Day rallies by Arabs in northern Israel and on the occupied West Bank could turn violent and lead to a renewed series of anti-Israeli demonstrations.

Seven Arabs were killed by Israeli troops in the Galilee region during rioting that accompanied a general strike on March 30 organized by Israel's Rakah Communist Party. The acting director of the Israeli labor federation's Arab affairs department recently told an official of the US embassy in Tel Aviv that tension among Arab citizens in Galilee continues to be high.

The police rejected a request from Rakah to hold a May Day parade in Nazareth and the decision, appealed by Rakah was upheld by the Israeli Supreme Court. Police officials, however, have granted Rakah permission to hold an open air meeting in Nazareth. Rakah leaders expect several thousand people to attend the meeting.

Any new Arab demonstrations in Israel proper would help Arab nationalists on the West Bank whip up support for a march they are reportedly planning to stage next week to protest the Passover march of April 18 and 19 that was sponsored by an Israeli group that is pushing for more Jewish settlements in the area.



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